

# Chogyam Trungpa: Shunyata as Cheap Escapism

The idea of egolessness has often been used to obscure the reality of birth, suffering and death. The problem is that, once we have a notion of egolessness and a notion of pain, birth and death, then we can easily entertain or justify ourselves by saying that pain does not exist because there is no ego to experience it, that birth and death do not exist because there is no one to witness them. This is just cheap escapism. The philosophy of *shunyata* has often been distorted by the presentation of the idea that: “There is no one to suffer, so who cares? If you suffer, it must be your illusion.” This is pure opinion, speculation. We can read about it, we can think about it, but when we actually suffer, can we remain indifferent? Of course not; suffering is stronger than our petty opinions. A true understanding of egolessness cuts through opinion. The absence of a notion of egolessness allows us to fully experience pain, birth, death because then there are no philosophical paddings.

The whole idea [of egolessness] is that we must drop all reference points, all concepts of what is or what should be. Then it is possible to experience the uniqueness and vividness of phenomena directly. There is tremendous room to experience things, to allow experience to occur and pass away. Movement happens within vast space. Whatever happens, pleasure, pain, birth, death and so forth, are not interfered with but are experienced in their fullest flavour. Whether they are sweet or sour, they are experienced completely, without philosophical overlays or emotional attitudes to make things seem loveable or presentable.

We are never trapped in life, because there are constant opportunities for creativity, challenges for improvisation. Ironically, by seeing clearly and acknowledging our egolessness, we may discover that suffering contains bliss, impermanence contains continuity or eternity and egolessness contains the earth quality of solid being. But this transcendental bliss, continuity and beingness is not based on fantasies, ideas or fears.

—from *The Myth of Freedom* by Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche, p. 14-15.

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